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October 13, 2017

Mr. Eric Hargan
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Ms. Brenda Fitzgerald
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, Georgia 30329-4027

Dear Acting Secretary Hargan and Director Fitzgerald:

I write to request immediate federal assistance to fight the ongoing, deadly hepatitis A virus outbreak in San Diego County, California.

As you are aware, the San Diego Health Department began examining a cluster of hepatitis A cases in March of this year. Since that time, the virus has continued to spread and it is now the largest hepatitis A outbreak the country has experienced in over a decade. According to the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency, as of October 10, more than 490 individuals have been infected, resulting in 342 hospitalizations and, tragically, the loss of 18 lives. On September 1, 2017, the San Diego County Public Health Officer declared a local public health emergency for the county, yet the virus continues to spread.

Because the virus has a long, sustainable incubation period, it can be particularly difficult to detect and halt the infection, especially amongst those in our community who are most at-risk, including the homeless, illicit drug users, and those working with these populations on a daily basis. Unfortunately, San Diego County is also grappling with one of the nation's largest homelessness crises as the number of our homeless residents has risen to over 9,100 – the fourth highest population in the nation.

While San Diego is experiencing the overwhelming majority of current hepatitis A cases, the entire state of California is at risk. A number of counties are already seeing signs of the disease spreading in their communities. Infections of the same strain of the virus have cropped up in Orange, Santa Cruz, and Los Angeles counties. In fact, health officials in Los Angeles County were forced to declare their own hepatitis A outbreak just last month. Infection from the virus may also be tied to cases as far away as Arizona.

The outbreak has brought statewide totals to three times the number of reported cases in 2015, or almost half of what was reported in the entire country. San Diego County has already vaccinated more than 54,000 at-risk people, and spent over \$3 million in attempts to contain it.

Yet, the problem remains and the public is fearful. Given these growing concerns, we must take steps to mitigate further infection. I urgently request additional assistance from the federal government.

1. I ask the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to dedicate further financial assistance for hepatitis A outbreak treatment and prevention to the state of California, especially to San Diego County. Further, I request HHS to work with other federal agencies to immediately identify and provide available emergency grant funding to enhance substantial local efforts to contain this virus and halt its spread, and aid neighboring communities in preparedness efforts.
2. I ask HHS and the CDC to immediately develop and present a comprehensive plan of guidance and technical assistance to all state and local health departments on the steps and methods necessary to halt the infection.
3. I ask HHS and the CDC to immediately assist state and local health departments on providing public education and awareness campaigns to help inform the public on how to protect themselves and stop the spread of the virus.
4. I ask HHS and the CDC to make additional public health officials, pathologists, epidemiologists, physicians, or other necessary experts available on-the-ground to immediately assist local experts with efforts to contain the outbreak and deter its spread.
5. The California Department of Public Health has already distributed more than 79,600 doses of hepatitis A vaccines; I ask HHS and the CDC to help our local public health agencies to ensure adequate supply and distribution chains are available and ready.
6. Furthermore, I ask HHS and the CDC to provide a written report within 30 days of this letter which includes the total amount of federal funds spent on hepatitis A each year since FY2007, a description and purpose of the programs to which the funds have been allocated, how much money has been directed specifically to California over the last 5 years, and guidance on how the federal government will assist with emergency resources in the case of a sustained and/or growing hepatitis A outbreak.

We cannot wait until more communities are infected and impacted before taking action. I ask for thoughtful consideration of the health of San Diegans and our neighboring communities. I look forward to a full and complete response as soon as possible. Please contact Chelsea Schull in my Washington, D.C. Office at 202.225.3906 for additional information. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Darrell Issa
Member of Congress